

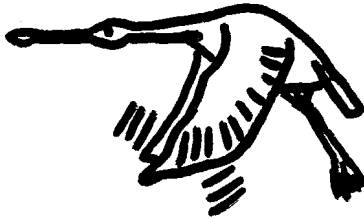
FIELD NOTES

The Pink Pause, A Previously Undescribed Behavior By Roseate Spoonbills

While watching Roseate Spoonbills (*Ajaia ajaja*) flying in and out of a nesting colony located at Tern Key, Florida Bay, Everglades National Park, I noticed an interesting flight behavior by the "pinks" that has not been described (Allen 1942, *The Roseate Spoonbill*, Nat. Audubon Soc., New York; Palmer 1962, *Handbook of North American Birds*. Vol. 1. Yale U. Press, New Haven). I follow the tradition of animal behaviorists in having the privilege of naming newly described behaviors, and call this activity "Pink Pause."

The Pink Pause occurs as follows. Occasionally when 2 or more spoonbills were flying together, the birds in unison would interrupt steady, flapping flight to make a short up-glide, at the top of which they would arch their backs, with wings stiff and angled down, head and neck extended, and feet and tail lowered (Figure 1). The birds would either pause in this position for less than a second without flapping, and then resume normal flight, or they would maintain a hover position through a shallow, stiff-winged flapping below the body for 2 or 3 seconds before resuming regular flight.

Fig. 1. Roseate Spoonbill in Pink Pause hovering posture.



I observed spoonbill flight patterns at Tern Key on 11 days between 5 November 1975 and 14 January 1976. The number of birds and time of day for all spoonbill "traffic" in and out of the colony was recorded, as part of an effort to determine relationships between the number of birds in flight lines and the number of active nests.

Observations of the Pink Pause were made on 8 of the 11 days, on 5, 12 and 26 November; 2, 9 and 23 December; and 2 and 6 January; but not on 17 December or 8 and 14 January. All birds performing this behavior were flying outbound from the island. Typically the outbound flights consisted of either single birds or small groups of

pinks that had risen from different parts of the island and came together as they headed out over water towards feeding ground about 16 to 24 km away.

All observations of the Pink Pause involved two or more birds flying close together (often 3 or 4, once as many as 15), mostly over water 30 to 200 m from the colony. With 2 exceptions, all observations involved single performances of this behavior during straight-line flights away from the colony. Once 3 birds circled over the water before doing the Pink Pause, and once 6 birds repeated the Pink Pause 3 times at 30 to 125 m intervals.

Few birds performed the Pink Pause, as is illustrated in the following examples. On 9 December, during 5 hours 30 minutes of observation, only 11 birds in 4 groups out of a total 493 outgoing birds did the Pink Pause; on 23 December, during 5 hours 15 minutes, 6 birds of 676 outgoing birds did the Pink Pause; and on 2 January, during 4 hours 5 minutes, 21 birds of 380 did the Pink Pause. This behavior was performed at different times of day, from shortly after sunrise (0715) to early afternoon (1300; spoonbill flight activity is much reduced in afternoons). Adults primarily did the Pink Pause, but at least once a group of 3 included one paler subadult.

The function of the Pink Pause remains unknown. As the frequency of the Pink Pause seemed rather constant between early November and early January (with many nests containing small young by mid-December) rather than occurring more frequently earlier in the observation period, it seems unlikely that this behavior is related to pair-formation or colony formation. However, I had no way of knowing the stages of nesting of the birds that actually performed the Pink Pause. Although the birds that did the Pink Pause were usually flying within a few feet of each other, this mid-air pause appeared to bring them more closely into a tight, flying group prior to the long over-water flight. Conceivably the Pink Pause is a behavior that results in tight flocking and thus more efficient flying over long distances. Various types of formation flying apparently are aerodynamically advantageous (Lissman and Shollenberger 1970, *Science* 168: 1003-1005; Gould and Heppner 1974, *Auk* 91: 494-506), and spoonbills do routinely fly in echelon formations. It did not appear from my observations at Tern Key, however, that the Pink Pause was quickly followed by a formation alignment. Outgoing pinks often did work into a formation (usually further out from the colony than where the Pink Pause was performed) whether they did the Pink Pause or not. — *John C. Ogden, National Audubon Society, Research Department, 115 Indian Mound Trail, Tavernier, Florida 33070.*